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AUTHOR Shuman, R. Baird
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ABSTRACT

Content area teachers at the secondary level should teach students specific techniques for handling the reading materials in their disciplines. This paper points out the need for administrators to overcome attitudinal barriers of content teachers with regard to teaching reading skills and shows how compulsory attendance laws have led to the presence in secondary schools of a wide range of students, many of whom need help in improving their reading skills. It then indicates the relationship of reading to substantive courses and offers strategies and sample exercises for helping students learn to alphabetize and to use indexes. The paper also discusses using the cloze procedure, helping students untangle sentence structures, instructing students in the role of connectives, setting up a reading corner, determining the readability of printed materials, and examining textbooks for their use of specialized vocabulary. Finally, the role of the principal in a school-wide reading program is discussed. A number of relevant books and journals are suggested for inclusion in a secondary school library. (GW)

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# TEACHING TEACHERS TO TEACH READING

R. Baird Shuman

This paper will consider some strategies for helping content area teachers at the secondary school level find effective ways to instruct their students in specific techniques of handling the reading materials they will necessarily have to cope with in order to understand the substance of the several disciplines which comprise secondary school curricula. Fortunately, most recent graduates of teacher training institutions have completed at least one course in the teaching of reading to meet state certifications requirements. Such teachers are also aware, as is the general public, of reported declines in the mastery of the basic skills of communication, including reading, which are evidenced in the test scores of today's secondary school population. In-service work in teaching reading in the content areas has become increasingly available to secondary school teachers in the past decade.

## Teacher Attitudes

If reading instruction, which is a school-wide concern, is to become as well a school-wide responsibility, subject matter supervisors, department chairpersons, and all building administrators need to work to help shape the attitudes toward reading of those who teach in their bailiwicks. Despite the

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R. Baird Shuman is Professor of English and Director of English Education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The author of some 300 articles and nine books, his most recent publications are Creative Approaches to the Teaching of English: Secondary (Peacock, 1974) and Questions English Teachers Ask (Hayden, 1977). During 1978, the National Education Association will publish his Strategies for Teaching Reading/Secondary and Scarecrow will publish his Educational Drama for Today's Schools. Mr. Shuman serves as Executive Editor of The Clearing House.

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strides that have been made toward informing teachers of the breadth and gravity of the reading problem, many teachers still are extremely elitist in their approaches to education and in their attitudes toward offering reading instruction at the secondary school level. Common among their attitudes are the following:

> I am a history (mathematics, science, foreign language, home economics) teacher, not a reading teacher;
>
> Kids who cannot read adequately should not be in secondary school;
>
> I don't know enough about reading to teach it;
>
> I shouldn't be called upon to do what the elementary school could not accomplish;
>
> I don't have time to teach reading in my history (mathematics, science, foreign language, home economics) course.

Most of these common attitudes indicate a greater concern with subject matter than with students and a greater concern with teaching (that is, presenting) factual data to students than with having students master modes of obtaining information.

Facing Realities

American public school teachers must realize that they are functioning within an educational framework which has evolved to its present state over a long number of years. Compulsory attendance laws mandate that every child who

is physically able to attend school will do so until a given age, usually sixteen. Whereas in 1900, one out of every ten children who completed eighth grade continued to high school, which was at that time almost exclusively college preparatory, today more than 90% of the same population attends secondary school. This is attributable to a number of influences, not the least of which is that as our society has moved from agricultural to industrial, it has been unable to accommodate large numbers of unskilled workers. Compulsory attendance laws served the dual purpose of keeping fourteen-year-olds out of the labor pool for two or three additional years and, at the same time, of exposing them to an environment in which some of them might learn additional skills. From a crassly economic point of view, the first reason has consistently been a very important one.

As compulsory attendance laws caused the secondary school population to explode numerically, the public at large continued to view a high school diploma as an indication of attainment equal to that of the élite group which in 1900 and before obtained such a diploma. When it became evident, as it inevitably had to, that some latter day high school graduates could not perform simple operations such as spelling, ciphering, or reading, the public blamed the schools and called them inefficient. Simultaneously, teachers who had been used to teaching students preparatory to their entrance into college were completely baffled by the deficiencies in background of the new breed of student appearing on the scene. Many, under the guise of "maintaining standards," refused to change and reached an impasse with their students, many of whom became either overtly hostile toward school or hopelessly apathetic. Now, seven decades later, one still finds all too many such elitists teaching in secondary schools and in many situations the impasse remains, along with the

hostility and the apathy.

Until every secondary school teacher comes to realize that every student who is compelled by law to attend school must be offered something by the school which will engage his or her intellect, compulsory attendance will be to many a form of involuntary servitude. Too few teachers realize that some of the intense problems that face education today stem not from a clash of the bright with the stupid, which they would like to think, but from a clash in value systems and backgrounds. The compelling results of a growing body of well-conceived research data clearly indicate that many students who fail in school and many students who for one reason or another do not learn to read (which often is synonymous with failure) are as bright as those who succeed in school.[1] If our pluralistic society is to function at its most efficient and productive level, then the talents within it must be developed to the greatest possible extent, and this means that (1) students must be nurtured in the things which they are most capable of doing well and succeeding at, and (2) that all teachers must be concerned with teaching students whatever skills are necessary for them to master if they are to work successfully within a given subject area. American public education is not elitist and teachers who attempt to make it so are not attuned philosophically to the demands of the society in which they live. If attitudinal barriers are not dealt with initially, it is doubtful that any program designed to help teach teachers to teach reading can succeed.

## The Relationship of Reading to Substantive Courses

Reading courses are designed to teach a skill and, at the high school level, are largely methodological. Courses in subject areas, while they also teach some skills, are very much concerned as well with seeing that students

gain mastery over a specified body of factual material. Teachers may at first glance view the aims of reading instruction and subject matter as incompatible.

However, in the initial stages of instruction in most secondary school subjects, teachers, without giving a second thought to it, are involved in offering elements of reading instruction. The most obvious area in which they give such instruction is in helping students to master the specialized vocabulary of whatever subject they happen to be studying. Teachers do not expect typical beginners to know words like amoeba, paramecium, sociopath, ganglion, allergen, polynomial, coefficient, integer, exponent, stereotypical, interclass, interrelationships, or westernization, so they routinely spend class time equipping students with the fundamental vocabulary of the subject matter to be covered.

All too frequently, however, subject matter teachers are oblivious to some other types of problems that interfere with the learning process. They need to ask themselves, "What skills do my students need in order to handle the printed materials that we must use?" Then they must set out to determine whether their students are possessed of these skills. If they are lacking in some of them, then the first order of business is to find means of erasing the deficiencies which will stand between the student and the subject matter.

Fundamental Skills to Be Taught

Many secondary school teachers presume that their students know the alphabet and are able to alphabetize. Such a presumption may, indeed, be erroneous. If students are unable to work easily with the alphabet, then they will have great difficulty using indexes and reference works such as encyclopaedias. Teachers might devote five or ten minutes of class time to administering a simple teacher-constructed diagnostic test on alphabetizing. It

should begin with perhaps fifteen groups of three words, drawn from the course materials and set up as follows:

> Indicate the alphabetical order of the words in each group below by placing in the spaces provided a "1" for the word which would come first alphabetically, a "2" for the word which would come second, and a "3" for the word which would come third.
>
> Example: 3 verb
> 1 antecedent
> 2 noun

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ plywood | _____ loblolly | _____ allergist |
| _____ kiln | _____ fire | _____ allergy |
| _____ salvaging | _____ fir | _____ allergic |

The means of alphabetizing should become increasingly more sophisticated, as they have in the above somewhat telescoped examples, in which the first group of words can be alphabetized by the initial letters, whereas the third group of words can be alphabetized only by going to the seventh or eighth letters. When students have completed fifteen groups of three words each, then they should move to a similar exercise with groups of five words each:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ truancy | | _____ synonym |
| _____ societal | | _____ synthetic |
| _____ adolescence | and graduating to | _____ synthesis |
| _____ popularity | | _____ synchronize |
| _____ unpredictable | | _____ syncopation |

In every case, the words should be taken from textbooks and/or materials which students are using in a given course.

The next step after this one would again involve a five to ten minute session at the beginning or ending of a class period. Students would be given four or five questions, the answer to each of which might be found in the index of a book. An actual index page might be copied and dittoed or students might use their own textbooks for this exercise. A typical example would be as follows:

oak, 124-56, 242, 247, 271, 304
  black oak, 127, 134-36
  blight, 142-47
  bur oak, 129-131, 146, 154
  chestnut oak, 135-36, 155
  distribution of, 155-57
  diseases of, 142-47, 149-52, 247, 304
  live oak, 124, 271
  red oak, 139-41
  southern oak, 144-48
  swamp oak, 242
  white oak, 129-30, 154, 304
  willow oak, 304
oak apple, 164
oak, sales of, 177-81
  domestic, 177
  export, 179
  foreign, 180-81

Typical questions relating to this portion of an index might be

1. On what page(s) would you look to discover what kinds of oak are found in the South?
   Ans._____

2. On what page(s) would you look to find out what endangers oaks other than blight?
   Ans._____

3. What two items in the index are out of alphabetical order? Ans._____

4. Where might you look to discover how much oak Europe buys from the United States?
   Ans._____

There will be disputes regarding the answers to questions such as those above, and discussion should follow the brief test which, incidentally, should be be used diagnostically and should not be recorded as a grade to be used in

computing students' averages.

The teacher might forsee that the likely answers to question 1 would be "155-57" (the correct answer) and "144-48" (incorrect because southern oak is a kind of oak and this reference would not tell the kinds of oak that are found in the South). An exercise of this sort is a first step toward critical and interpretive reading.

## The Cloze Procedure

The cloze procedure, a valuable tool for determining whether a given book is too difficult or too easy for a reader, is of greater use at the elementary than at the secondary school level. Since material on which students score about 50% correct is considered to be at a student's approximate reading level, students are expected to make numerous mistakes and omissions. When the procedure is used with teen-agers, many of whom have reading difficulties, they are often demoralized by the test so that any information that might accrue to the teacher through it is gotten at a very high price in terms of the self-confidence of the students involved.

## A Group Approach to Untangling Sentence Structure

Many high school textbooks and other materials commonly used in schools are written in difficult, convoluted ways. Students become lost in the verbiage and some of them as a result develop a considerable antipathy toward books. Sometimes their confidence can be restored and enhanced if the teacher takes a few sample sentences from reading materials in the course, writes the sentence, one word at a time, with a magic marker on large sheets of construction paper, so that an eight word sentence would yield eight sheets of construction paper each containing one word.

As students file into the room, give each of the first eight a card and ask everyone with a card to stand in the front of the room. Then, when the rest of the class is assembled, say, "You eight people turn yourselves into a sentence." I have known many alleged non-readers to read on the spot in such a situation. Students with cards reading "the" or "a" look for nouns they can go with. Verbs look for nouns they can follow. Adjectives and adverbs seek out the words they can modify, prepositions worm their way into the lineup, and all at once a sentence crystallizes. The students in their seats, almost without exception, are able to read it. They are also eager to be participants in a game with a very vital learning outcome.

The Role of Connectives

Recent research in reading has indicated that many reading problems in various content areas occur because students are not familiar with the grammatical conjunctions (connectives) commonly used in writing about that content area. Most teachers apparently take for granted that students can handle grammatical conjunctions, and they do little to teach them. However, writing style is intimately connected with the use of such words, as one quickly realizes in reading a legal contract, for example, and teachers should scan the printed materials which their students are using with a conscious effort to determine which connectives are most often used in the material, and how they are used.[2] Students should then be instructed in how these connectives signal certain things: "but," for instance, signals a contrary statement; "and" combines two similar elements; "moreover" paves the way for additional facts or information.

The Reading Corner

To whatever extent it is practically feasible to do so, teachers should

have in their classrooms reading corners, quiet areas with some chairs and a table or two. These corners should contain all sorts of printed materials related to the subject--books, magazines, posters, maps, charts, newsletters, pictures--and students should be encouraged to go to this area when they have finished their regular work and in it to pursue some reading that interests them.

A classroom library of 50-100 books relating to the subject matter should be housed in the reading corner, on loan from the library. Students with reading problems often do not go to the library voluntarily, but if books are available to them, they may work on improving their reading skills.

Some student writing should be displayed in the reading corner, both because of the boost it will give to the students whose work is displayed and because students like to read other students' work. Also, if student work is displayed on a rotating basis, students gain incentive for writing materials which might qualify for display.

Determining the Readability of Printed Materials

Subject matter teachers can do much to guide students to materials which are not beyond their level of difficulty. Robert Aukerman has determined that students experience reading difficulties in literature textbooks in direct proportion to "(1) sentence length, (2) sentence complexity, (3) incidence of verbals, (4) incidence of word difficulty, and (5) incidence of abstraction," [3] and these factors affect the readability of materials in any subject area. Teachers who bear this in mind can be of enormous assistance to students as they attempt to select materials to read. Probably sentence length is one of the most reliable indexes of readability in all subject areas.

Teachers who examine printed materials with readability in mind, soon can tell by a few well selected glances whether something is likely to call for refined reading skills or whether students with limited reading proficiency will be able to handle it.

Specialized Vocabulary

Teachers are sometimes unaware that when a textbook is said to have a specific level of readability (6th grade reading level, for example), the assessment of readability is based upon all of the non-specialized and non-technical vocabulary in the book.

Examining at random a book in the field of hygiene, which is in common use in secondary schools and which is touted as having a moderate readability level for secondary school students, I found the following words on three randomly selected pages:

| Page 15 | Page 115 | Page 218 |
|---|---|---|
| impetigo | histrionic | cranial |
| eczema | narcissistic | sensory |
| epidermis | conceit | cylinder |
| dermatitis | cater | vertebrae |
| synthetic | arrogant | meninges |
| detergents | antisocial | membranes |
| antiperspirants | sociopathic | cerebrospinal |
| deodorants | suspicious | neurons |
| allergist | truancy | posterior |
| causative | alcoholism | anterior |
| allergen | pessimistic | peripheral |
| pollens | unpredictable | ganglion |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| antibiotics | therapeutic | paralysis |
| dander | adolescence | pneumonia |
| dermatologist | defiance | impulses[4] |

Some of the words listed above are defined within the text, others are not. Every word listed above would present a problem to a disabled reader, and the concentration of this many difficult words on one page of a book would be extremely discouraging to anyone who had not had some specific instruction in the specialized vocabulary of the reading assignment prior to attempting to read it.

Teachers will benefit greatly from looking at Robert C. Aukerman's splendid list in impedilexae (difficult words within specific disciplines) which he presents in Reading in the Secondary School Classroom (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972) for social studies, English, science, mathematics, business, industrial arts, vocational education, and home economics. Those teaching in fields not listed in this book would do well to draw up their own lists of impedilexae using Aukerman's technique for doing so.

Administrative Support

The most important key to establishing a strong reading program in a secondary school is the principal. Principals who firmly believe that reading instruction is a school-wide responsibility will encourage every teacher to incorporate some reading instruction into every subject matter lesson. Principals also can encourage librarians to work cooperatively with teachers who wish to set up classroom libraries. Every secondary school library should have a well balanced collection of professional books relating to reading instruction and there should be multiple copies of such practically important books as Aukerman's, aforementioned, Guy Bond and Miles Tinker's Reading

Difficulties: Their Diagnosis and Correction, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967); Lou E. Burmeister's Reading Strategies for Secondary School Teachers (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974); Lawrence E. Hafner's Developmental Reading in Middle and Secondary Schools: Foundations, Strategies, and Skills for Teaching (New York: Macmillan, 1977); his Improving Reading in Middle and Secondary Schools, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974); Harold Herber's Teaching Reading in Content Areas (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); David L. Shepherd's Comprehensive High School Reading Methods (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1973); and Miles V. Zintz's The Reading Process, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1975). Principals can also see to it that the library regularly receives the publications of the International Reading Association, particularly Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, and Reading Research Quarterly, that journals of the state affiliate of IRA are regularly received, and that Reading Horizons is subscribed to.

Principals can see that any reading specialists who serve in their schools work not only with students but also with teachers who need help. Principals are in a position to arrange in-service sessions on reading in content areas within their schools and to encourage teachers who wish to go to reading conventions in order to learn more about how to teach reading in the content area.

## Every Teacher a Reading Teacher

Every effective teacher in today's secondary schools is a reading teacher to a certain extent. Many would like to work more knowledgeably to help their students deal with the specific materials on their disciplines. It remains for them to seek out practical ways of doing so. With administrative support, understanding, and encouragement, with a fuller understanding of what

technical problems are posed by the reading materials in their disciplines, these teachers can make headway in helping their students to become more effective readers and, thereby, become stronger students.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Among the more compelling research findings are those reported in the following: Jane W. Torrey, "Illiteracy in the Ghetto," Harvard Educational Review, 40 (Fall, 1970), pp. 256-259; William Labov and Clarence Robins, "A Note on the Relationship of Reading Failure to Peer-Group Status in Urban Ghettos," in Johanna S. DeStefano, ed., Language Society, and Education: A Profile of Black English (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 312-323; the papers included in Frank Smith, ed., Psycholinguistics and Reading (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973); William Labov, The Study of Nonstandard English (Champaign, IL: NCTE, 1970); _____, The Social Stratification of English in New York City (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966); _____, Paul Cohen, and Clarence Robins, A Preliminary Study of the Structure of English Used by Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City (Washington, DC: Final Report--Cooperative Research Project No. 3091, Office of Education, 1965); Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966); _____ and Mildred Reed Hall, "Nonverbal Communication for Educators," Theory Into Practice, 16 (June, 1977), pp. 141-144. See also Neil Postman's compelling article, "The Politics of Reading," Harvard Educational Review, 40 (May, 1970), pp. 244-252.

[2] Two lucid articles on this topic are Denis Rodgers' "Which Connectives? Signals to Enhance Comprehension," Journal of Reading, 17 (March, 1974), pp. 462-66, and Jean E. Robertson's "Pupil Understanding of Connectives in Reading," Reading Research Quarterly, 3 (Spring, 1968), pp. 388-417.

[3] Robert C. Aukerman, "Readability of Secondary School Literature Textbooks: A First Report," English Journal, 54 (1965), p. 535.

[4] James H. Otto, Cloyd J. Julian, and J. Edward Tether, Modern Health (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976).